



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Issues Warning About Hantavirus Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – People who are cleaning cabins or other buildings that were closed for the winter should protect themselves against hantavirus, a disease transmitted by infected mice, according to Lindsey VanderBusch, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

“Hantavirus infection has been associated with cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins or other dwellings,” VanderBusch said. “It’s important to take precautions while cleaning buildings that are infested with rodents. Preventing infection is important since there is no specific treatment for the disease.”

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Mice carry the disease and spread the virus to people in urine, fecal droppings and saliva. People normally become infected when they breathe in air contaminated with the virus when fresh rodent urine, droppings or nesting materials are disturbed and tiny droplets containing the virus get into the air. The disease is not transmitted from person to person.

Symptoms of HPS usually occur two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and severe shortness of breath when lungs fill with fluid.

Eleven cases of HPS have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health since 1993; the most recent was reported in 2009. Six of the North Dakota cases were fatal. From 1993 through December 1, 2009, 534 cases have been reported in the United States, of which 36 percent were fatal.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

The Department of Health offers the following tips for preventing rodent infestation from occurring and for properly disinfecting areas that become contaminated by rodents:

- For severe or persistent infestations, contact a pest-control professional for rodent eradication or a building contractor for rodent exclusion (rodent proofing), or consult with the North Dakota Department of Health by calling 800.472.2180.
- Seal all entry holes through which a rodent can enter.
- Clear clutter and tall grass away from buildings to eliminate sources of nesting materials.
- **Do not** sweep or vacuum areas with evidence of rodent infestation, such as nests or fecal droppings. This action may stir up and aerosolize the viral particles.
- Wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
- Thoroughly wet contaminated area with a disinfectant or bleach solution before wiping up with a paper towel.

For more information, contact Lindsey VanderBusch or Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

Please note: A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at www.ndhealth.gov/Disease.

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